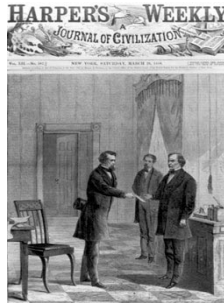


Senate Statistics

Sergeants at Arms

George T. Brown (1861-1869)



Sergeant at Arms George T. Brown serves the impeachment trial summons to President Andrew Johnson on March 28, 1868.

It was like collecting baseball cards. Find a photograph of every person who ever served as Senate sergeant at arms. In March 1957, perhaps influenced by the start of baseball spring training, Sergeant at Arms Joseph Duke asked an assistant to track down the missing photo of his predecessor George T. Brown. Brown had served as Sergeant at Arms from 1861 to 1869 and was particularly famous for his signature, which appeared on Senate chamber gallery passes for the 1868 impeachment trial of President [Andrew Johnson](#). Duke's assistant began what proved to be a very difficult search by contacting the public library in Brown's home town of Alton, Illinois.

Brown's family had moved from Scotland, where he was born in 1820, to Alton in the early 1830s. As with other aspiring young men of his day, Brown decided to study law. He chose as his teacher Lyman Trumbull, a leading Illinois political figure. Brown enjoyed politics more than the practice of law and in 1846 successfully campaigned to become Alton's mayor. After a term in that office, he served as a town alderman and, in 1852, narrowly missed gaining the Democratic party's nomination as lieutenant governor of Illinois.

While pursuing an active political life, Brown also developed various business interests and became a director of the local railroad. In 1852, he established the Alton Daily Morning Courier, which soon gained a reputation as "the best and most influential daily in the state outside Chicago [with] the finest and most complete [office building and printing] plant in Illinois."

Brown's political career took a promising turn in 1854 after Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Designed to ease dangerous tensions over the slavery issue, this intensely controversial law, which allowed local settlers to decide whether they wanted slavery in those territories, sparked an explosion of anger on the part of antislavery forces who saw it as a sell-out to the proslavery South. This anger produced a potent new political

alliance—the Republican party. Later that year, Brown won a seat in the Illinois legislature as an "Anti-Nebraska" Democrat.

In those days, state legislatures elected United States senators. When former Illinois U.S. Representative [Abraham Lincoln](#) launched a campaign early in 1855 to win a U.S. Senate seat, George Brown was among the legislators whose vote he actively solicited. In the first ballot, Lincoln led other candidates, but failed to obtain the required majority. To ensure the election of a candidate who shared his opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Lincoln shifted his support to Free-Soil Democrat Lyman Trumbull, Brown's former law teacher. Lincoln's move assured Trumbull's election and launched a Senate career that spanned the next eighteen years. (Lincoln tried again for the other Illinois Senate seat four years later, but lost to incumbent [Stephen Douglas](#), the principal sponsor of the Kansas-Nebraska Act.)

In 1856, as that year's presidential campaign got underway, Lincoln and other leading opponents of the Kansas-Nebraska Act called for a political convention in Bloomington, Illinois, to establish a platform for like-minded candidates. With newly converted Republican George Brown presiding, this convention established the Republican party in Illinois. Brown introduced a resolution attacking Democrat Stephen Douglas who had "violated the confidence of the people of Illinois and now holds his seat in the Senate while he misrepresents them." Lincoln concluded the convention with a spellbinding speech that confirmed his standing as an emerging party leader of great stature. Later generations of Lincoln scholars owe George Brown their thanks for taking notes and publishing the only known account of Lincoln's dramatic oration.

The political friendship among Brown, Lincoln, and Trumbull deepened during this turbulent period leading to civil war. In the 1860 elections, Republicans won control of the presidency and both houses of Congress. As southern states withdrew their congressional delegations following Lincoln's victory, George Brown decided to close his financially ailing newspaper and move to Washington. When the Senate convened in emergency session on July 4, 1861, the Senate Republican caucus awarded choice patronage assignments to Judiciary Committee Chairman Lyman Trumbull, as a key party member from the new president's state. Trumbull arranged for Brown to be elected the following day as the Senate's first Republican sergeant at arms.

With Confederate forces within easy striking distance of Washington, Sergeant at Arms Brown faced grave security responsibilities, including protection of the Capitol from the thousands of Union soldiers camped out in its rooms and corridors in the war's early years. Throughout the war, in addition to his routine duties, Brown performed special tasks for the president and Senate party leaders. During Lincoln's 1864 reelection campaign, the Republican National Committee assigned him to distribute campaign flyers to Union army troops. At the completion of that contest, Brown proudly reported to Trumbull that he had "distributed nearly a million documents, nearly all to the Army, from Maine to Louisiana."

Brown's saddest duty as sergeant at arms came after Lincoln's assassination, when he arranged for the slain president to lie in state on a specially constructed catafalque in the Capitol Rotunda. He then accompanied the body on its long journey back home to Illinois.

Little is known of George Brown's day-to-day activities as sergeant at arms. He emerged briefly from historical obscurity on the afternoon of Saturday, March 7, 1868, when he traveled from the Capitol to the White House to present President Andrew Johnson with a summons to his Senate impeachment trial. Unlike the 1999 Clinton proceedings for which Sergeant at Arms James Ziglar presented the summons to the president's counsel in a White House administrative office, Sergeant at Arms Brown was ushered directly into the president's formal office. There, he found only Johnson and a private secretary. He handed the summons to the president, who read it and passed it back, saying that he "would attend to the matter." In sketching that historic encounter for the cover of the March 28, 1868, issue of Harper's Weekly newspaper, Artist T. R. Davis provided one of the only known likenesses of George T. Brown.

In March 1869, the Senate elected a former House member as its new sergeant at arms. Lacking adequate biographical information, it is now difficult to determine whether Brown wished to leave his post after eight traumatic years or whether party leaders simply decided it was time to elect a new officer, just as they had recently replaced the secretary of the Senate, whose service also began in 1861.

Nearing age fifty, Brown returned to Alton, Illinois. A biographical profile, published nearly fifty years later, contains this sad account of his final decade. In "his absence from the state, he had lost his prominence in politics and failing resources added to his misfortunes. He was unmarried and led a rather lonely life. . . . During his later years the journalistic instinct was still strong in him and he was accustomed to frequent the newspaper offices to look over the exchanges and thus keep pace with the world in which he had once borne a prominent part." George Brown died in Alton on June 10, 1880.

Sergeant at Arms Joe Duke failed in his 1957 search for a photograph. Five years later, also during baseball spring training, he asked the staff of Illinois Republican [Everett Dirksen](#), the Senate Minority Leader, to use their home-state influence to track down the missing photo. A letter from the Illinois secretary of state later described their extensive—and futile—search. "We scanned through old books around the office; we appealed to our Historical Library and they even went through the old Centennial papers from Alton; our photographic department made a search of old files." The conclusion: "I've decided that Mr. George T. Brown of Alton, Illinois was a gentleman who did not like to have his picture taken."